



ABIDING IN CHRIST,
ABOUNDING IN HOPE

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2005 SECTION C

VOICES & VISIONS



G E N E R A L S Y N O D X X V

EXTRAVAGANT WELCOME

By Joyce Hollyday

On Wednesday afternoon, July 6, the remnant of the staff of the Southeast Conference that was still standing carried the last vanload of stuff down the freight elevator in Atlanta's Georgia World Congress Center, drove it to West Peachtree Street, then hauled it up three stories to the Conference office. Candles, crosses, and cloth from the General Synod altar; a few boxes of unsold T-shirts, caps, and books; rocks, sand, several huge peace-lily plants, and an artificial Christmas tree that had been part of the backdrop on stage all found their way back home.

After we checked in to see how things were going down the road at the "UCC Golf Scramble," a post-Synod fundraiser, I was on my way home, too. Staff and a

few volunteers had shared a large breakfast buffet at the Omni Hotel that morning—our last on-site opportunity to toast a wondrous week, congratulate one another, and laugh raucously about the most outlandish questions asked of volunteers. On the long drive home, I pondered all the memories and said to myself, "I don't know when I've felt so exhausted, and so exhilarated." What a week it was!

For many of us, it began much the way it ended: carting endless boxes of "God is still speaking y'all" T-shirts, other Synod souvenirs, registration bags, worship resources, and peach candy from the Conference office and First Congregational Church to the Georgia World

CONGRATULATIONS
AND THANK YOU!

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Photographs by Nancy Chorpenning and Kathy Clark

"I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT UPON ALL . . .
AND YOUR YOUNG SHALL SEE VISIONS AND
YOUR OLD SHALL DREAM DREAMS."

ACTS 2:17

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

While over my nine years of Conference ministry I have on many occasions been proud of the staff and leadership of the Southeast Conference, I have never been as proud as I was at what we accomplished together as the hosts of the 25th General Synod of the United Church of Christ. In a word, it was *stunning*!

FROM THE
CONFERENCE
MINISTER



tions, exhibited a warm welcome and grace, which caused many of my colleagues to remark to me what a delight it must be to work and minister among such a people. It is indeed! Volunteers gave countless hours without complaint—no, with joy—and thanked me for the privilege of being a part of such an inspiring gathering. The Local Arrangements Committee, its leaders and subcommittees, were all remarkable in what they did and the way they

did it. Our staff, to a person, was a credit to us all, each bringing remarkable gifts to the task of hosting the Synod and representing our Conference.

The words that I have heard most often to describe General Synod are: *grace-filled, dynamic, inspiring, awesome, courageous, joyful, challenging, and powerfully faithful*. The newspaper headlines caught the more sensational moments, but they could not capture the spirit. The exhibit area was a marketplace of communities coming together with an effervescence of color and conversation. The worship experiences took us with rare eloquence and soaring inspiration to places of both challenge and comfort. The committee meetings were marked by open dialogue and careful listening. As I said in our Conference's welcoming comments to the General Synod, "It will either be a good time or a good story!" Who would have guessed it would be both? I have no doubt that the honor of hosting General Synod will leave an enduring mark on the life and character of the Southeast Conference for years to come.

"GRACE TO YOU AND PEACE . . ."

The General Synod took actions that will have a lasting impact on the life of the United Church of Christ as well: the

election of four members of the Collegium, changes to the bylaws of the UCC, and twenty-two resolutions ranging from matters having to do with the environment to human rights, from fair compensation for lay employees to social security, from affirming Jesus Christ as Lord to equality in marriage for all.

This General Synod has been an occasion that presses us to highlight two significant issues in our life together: the unity we know in Jesus Christ, which shapes the core of our covenant, binding us as a people of faith in the United Church of Christ; and the liberty of each setting of our beloved church to discern how it is to live out this covenant faithfully. These two impulses of mutuality and autonomy are at the heart of our identity as a people of God.

This General Synod is not the first time, nor will it be the last, that we will be stretched and challenged by the diversity of convictions that are held within our covenant. But at the heart of

what makes it possible for us to claim one another as beloved sisters and brothers in Christ gathered in one church is our respect for the liberty of each believer, and each congregation, to seek and discern the truth of faith in prayer, reflection, and study of Scripture. I believe that our witness to Jesus Christ is made stronger in the rich and diverse cacophony of voices that speak in accents of differing cultures, convictions, and theological traditions.

My prayer is that we resolve to continue to walk together, knowing that when we do not, we are all diminished by one another's absence. That said, I recognize with sadness that some within the United Church of Christ have said recently, "We cannot continue this pilgrimage with you." It is my hope that grace will mark not only our journey together, but our partings from one another as well, if they must happen.

General Synod was an awesome occasion, during which the Southeast Conference showed a spirit of hospitality and grace, and a love of justice and peace. It is this spirit that will sustain and strengthen us as we live into the calling of God that leads us forward.

In Christ's Peace,
Timothy C. Downs
Conference Minister

EXTRAVAGANT WELCOME

Congress Center. When one of our hand trucks lost a wheel, hampering what was already a daunting task, we resorted to commandeering a Pepsi cart—designed to be filled with ice and soda—piled it high with bags and took off for the registration area. From beginning to end, Synod volunteers from the Southeast Conference, along with the ecumenical partners who joined us, used ingenuity and graciousness to provide an outstanding Southern welcome to the 3,000 members of the United Church of Christ from around the country who gathered July 1-5 in Atlanta.

In his welcoming word to the gathered throng in the opening moments of General Synod, Conference Minister Tim Downs quoted Georgia author Flannery O'Connor, who once paraphrased John 8:32: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you odd." He reflected that those of us who are part of the United Church of Christ in the

South are often reminded of just how odd we are. And so with great delight, we offered an extravagant welcome to other members of our "odd family."

We decorated, transported, greeted, planned worship, provided childcare, sold souvenirs, acted as youth stewards, preached, sang, prayed, danced, cooked barbecue, gave directions, and answered endless questions. Whatever need or crisis arose—from a delegate who lost her luggage, to a participant who needed an emergency root canal, to a child who felt lonely away from home on her birthday—volunteers stepped in to provide clothes, a dentist, a party.

From the opening procession around the stunning baptismal font to the final anointing with oil, the diverse and wonderful gifts of this Conference were on display. Sunday morning brought a poignant celebration of the oral history project that led to the publication of *On the Heels of Freedom*, with Milton Hurst, Susan Mitchell, and Joyce

Hollyday preaching and several honored members of our American Missionary Association churches in attendance. That evening Kenneth Samuel preached with passion, aided by the exquisite dancing of Susan Mitchell and the energetic Victory Church dance troupe and choir. Monday evening brought a different mood, with the quiet jazz of Dwight Andrews and his

Continued from page 1

talented quintet—a soothing balm after an emotional day in which the UCC passed a historic resolution on marriage equality. That day, July 4, ended with many of us watching fireworks from our hotel windows across from Centennial Olympic Park.

A cadre of youth stewards added their own unique energy to the gathering, and young people were an integral part of the worship. Lena Alston offered an eloquent reading, her brother Kemet filled roles as candle bearer and anointer, and a lively group of young volunteers danced for the opening service.

The Southeast Conference was honored at both a lunch celebrating new church development and at the Local Church Ministries dinner—where the band of Birmingham's Beloved Community UCC provided a lively backdrop—in recognition of the pioneering work we have undertaken. Two individuals from the Conference were honored by General Synod as well—Walter Brueggemann, recently retired from Columbia Theological Seminary, whose prophetic scholarship has transformed the study of the Hebrew Scriptures; and Andrew Young, whose many years of witness to justice and civil rights have left a stellar mark on American history.

Desiree Pedescleaux-Andrews and Bennie Liggins, co-chairs of the Local Arrangements Committee, are to be



commended for a Synod that, from all appearances, went off without a hitch. Few people knew all the work behind the scenes from a dedicated legion of volunteers—the sore muscles, the aching backs, all the meals eaten at the Congress Center's Bologna Grill or skipped altogether, the scrambling that went on to make it all look smooth. The overwhelming response from the attendees was gratitude. One woman came by our sales table, handed over fifty dollars, and said, "I don't want to buy anything; I just want to thank you." When the staff and Local Arrangements Committee were summoned to the stage at the end of Synod on Tuesday afternoon—serenaded on the way by Ray Charles' "Georgia on My Mind"—the standing ovation from the crowd was exuberant and sustained.

When it was over, our Conference moderator, Dorothy Gager, proclaimed, "Never have I been prouder to be part of the Southeast Conference." She spoke the feeling of many of us. Southeast Conference, congratulations—and thank you!



INTO ROUGH WATERS

Lilton Marks Leads Military Chaplaincy in Iraq

On June 26, Col. Lilton J. Marks Sr. was deployed to Iraq, to begin serving as Command Chaplain for Multinational Forces there. Lilton is responsible for supervising chaplaincy programs, both religious services and one-on-one counseling, for U.S. and coalition forces, and is serving as the "pastor to the pastors"—which includes more than two hundred Army chaplains, in addition to those serving in the Air Force and Navy.

Lilton, a UCC pastor from the Southeast Conference, is a highly decorated soldier, whose medals include the Purple Heart. As a platoon leader during the Vietnam War, he was seriously wounded from the blast of a makeshift booby-trap and suffered through many grafts and operations. A few days before he left for Iraq, he reflected on the similarities of the situation there, where U.S. soldiers and Iraqi civilians face the constant threat of IEDs (improvised explosive devices). "Since I've been to Vietnam, I have some hesitation because of fear," he said of his imminent deployment. "I struggle with leaving my family."

"But," he added, "I do feel I need to be there, to do ministry with people in need of ministry. And I believe that God will be with me and will never fail me. We're all vulnerable; we all can die. But if you have deep faith, God can care for you—and for your family—even in death."

Lilton talked about the difficulties he faces as a UCC military chaplain. His beliefs are different from the more conservative, often fundamentalist, chaplains who populate the military. But he also often feels marginalized by his own denomination, which tends to



oppose war and embrace pacifism. "I first and foremost support nonviolent actions," he says. "But when we neglect humanity in a situation, we become blind to their concerns. Sometimes you have to go into conflict to effect change; to get into rough waters to bring some humanity in an otherwise inhumane situation."

In the past twenty years, according to Lilton, UCC ministers in the military chaplaincy have declined from more than two hundred to fewer than fifty. This is lamentable, he says, because "UCC ministers bring to the table the influence of how to live in an environment where people of different faiths exist. Because UCC pastors are poorly represented in the military, there is a lack of representation of the theological belief that people can believe differently and still live together with respect, tolerance, and care for each other."

It grieves Lilton that many people in the United Church of Christ who believe that war is wrong draw the conclusion that therefore the military is wrong, and military chaplaincy is wrong. He believes that "we impede our own efforts" by avoiding this ministry. "Military ministry is a valid and needed ministry." He poses the question if we should avoid serving in prisons, corrupt institutions, or churches that fall short of their best. "The answer, I assume, is no," he says. "Then why would we avoid ministry to God's people in the military?"

Lilton Marks requests the prayers of the Southeast Conference for him, the soldiers he serves, and their families. He asks especially for prayers for the families who have lost loved ones.



ABIDING IN CHRIST, ABUNDING IN HOPE

Around the Conference

OUR SYMPATHY

We mourn the loss of **Wilson Q. Welch, Jr.**, who served as pastor of Howard Congregational UCC in Nashville, TN, and was a former moderator of the Alabama-Tennessee Association and acting director of the Race Relations Institute at Fisk University. We also grieve the sudden death of **Milton Hurst**, who served First Congregational UCC in Talladega, AL, and was very involved in the ministries of the Conference and the national UCC (see a tribute to Milton on page 8).

We extend our sympathy to **Vant Hardaway**, whose mother, Stella Mae Hardaway, passed, and also to **Linda Magyar**, who recently lost her father, Paul Masonheimer.

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to **Elizabeth Clement**, a member of First Congregational UCC, Atlanta, and on the staff of Faith and the City in Atlanta, who was elected at General Synod to represent the Southeast Conference on the Board of Directors of the Office of General Ministries. Congratulations as well to **John Gill**, pastor of Church of the Savior UCC, Knoxville, TN, for his election to the Board of Directors of Justice and Witness Ministries. Our thanks to **Ellen Green**, of Pilgrimage UCC in Marietta, GA, for her service representing youth concerns in the national setting as part of Local Church Ministries. **Mary Moore**, recently returned from New York City, was one of the featured preachers in a Festival of Preaching held at Northside Drive Baptist Church, Atlanta.

MINISTRY TRANSITIONS

Derrick Noble, a graduate of the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, has been called to serve **Bethany Congregational UCC** in Thomasville, GA. **Christophe Ringer**, a graduate of Vanderbilt Divinity School, is being called as pastor of **Howard Congregational UCC** in Nashville. We welcome **Linda White**, who is ordained in the Presbyterian Church USA, as interim minister at **Brookmeade Congregational UCC**, Nashville. **Leah Fowler**, who was in care with the Georgia-South Carolina Association and ordained at Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta on August 28, has been called to serve as an associate pastor by Union Congregational UCC in Montclair, NJ.

The **Metropolitan Community Church of Columbia, SC**, has completed the first phase of exploring a relationship with the United Church of Christ. The next step in this process will be a conversation with the Georgia-South Carolina Association Church and Ministry Committee. **Holy Trinity Church**, a nondenominational congregation in Nashville, TN, currently nested in Brookmeade Congregational UCC, is also in a conversation with the Southeast Conference about the process of affiliating with the United Church of Christ.

EVENTS & OPPORTUNITIES

The Lombard Mennonite Peace Center is offering a five-day **Mediation Skills Training Institute** in Atlanta, November 14-18, 2005, for clergy and lay leaders. The institute is designed to equip church leaders with the skills necessary to deal effectively with interpersonal, congregational, and other forms of group conflict. It also includes a component on congregational intervention and consultation, placed within the context of family systems theory. The pre-registration deadline is October 17; after this date, the cost rises from \$595 to \$670. For further information, go to www.LMPeaceCenter.org.

The **UCC Regional Youth Event**, hosted by the Southern Conference and planned in collaboration with the Southeast Conference, will be held June 24-26, 2006, at Elon University.



Revs. Kathy Clark, Elizabeth Clement, and Kwai Sing Chang (pictured left to right), and Budd Friend-Jones (not pictured), were members of the inaugural class of the Faith and the City Leadership Institute, which seeks to prepare people of faith from diverse communities for expanded roles in public religious leadership. Faith and the City, founded in 1999 by former U.S. Ambassadors Andrew Young and James T. Laney, is a nonprofit organization established to encourage a sense of community throughout the twenty-county Atlanta metropolitan region, and to bring a moral dimension to civic dialogue. Elizabeth Clement is the Director of the Faith and the City Leadership Institute. The Class of 2006 is now being formed. For information, visit www.faithandthecity.org.

God is Still Speaking

Ministry Issues Pronouncement

What Does It Mean?

By Kathy Clark

Among all the concerns, conversations, and celebrations of General Synod XXV, we can be especially proud of the role that the Southeast Conference played in the passing of the Ministry Issues Pronouncement. As noted by Dick Sparrow, Minister and Team Leader of Parish Life and Leadership of the UCC Local Church Ministries, the Southeast Conference was one of a handful of Conferences that have consistently and energetically supported the decades-long work that culminated in the Pronouncement. Our beloved friend and colleague of blessed memory, the late Pastor Milton Hurst, served on the writing committee of this Pronouncement and helped to shepherd it through many years of consultation, collaboration, and creativity. This is but one of the ways in which Milton gracefully and eloquently invited us into seeing the future with new eyes. The Ministry Issues Pronouncement opens up new possibilities for forming and preparing pastoral leadership for the emerging Church at a time when new paradigms are needed.

What is the Ministry Issues Pronouncement, and what does it mean for the church and church leadership? I invite you to visit the website www.ucc.org to read the full text for yourself. In part, the Pronouncement calls upon Associations and Conferences "to make available paths of preparation for ordained ministry which are appropriate to the needs and possibilities of the church and community, including seminary education, regional theological formation programs, and mentoring." As has always been the case, it is the responsibility of the

Associations' Church and Ministry Committees, in covenant with local churches and students-in-care, to engage in a discernment process regarding the fitness of any particular candidate for authorized ministry and the appropriate path of preparation for that candidate. This is no small responsibility, but is rather a "splendid burden" (to borrow a phrase from Pope Paul VI) that Church and Ministry Committees assume on behalf of the whole church.

Does this mean that an individual candidate who experiences a call to ordained ministry can choose between going to seminary and enrolling in an alternative educational opportunity, such as the Theology Among the People (TAP) program? No, it does not. It is the role of the Church and Ministry Committee to make that recommendation. Just as a seminary degree in itself does not guarantee ordination, neither will it be the case that graduates of programs like TAP will automatically be eligible for ordination. What is encouraged by this pronouncement is that, where appropriate (as determined by Church and Ministry Committees), candidates for ordination may be able to include programs such as TAP in their overall preparation process, along with a number of years in supervised licensed ministry, and/or involvement in a mentoring program. Appropriate settings might include small rural or urban churches, or ethnic communities coming into the UCC with ministers whose training involved something other than the "traditional" path of four years of college and three years of seminary.

Concretely, the first step in implementing this Pronouncement will be the development of training materials and appropriate guidelines for Church and

Ministry Committees. Toward that end, Parish Life and Leadership, in partnership with Conference and Association staffs, seminaries, the Council on Racial and Ethnic Minorities, representatives of lay theological training programs, and others, will develop and deliver training to assist those upon whose shoulders these responsibilities fall. A Committee on the Ministry "Tool Kit" will be completed by late this fall and will include resources for organizing the work of the committees, assessing ministerial readiness, and practicing discernment, among others. The Manual on Ministry will be reviewed, revised, and reprinted by 2007, and constitution and bylaws changes will be ready in time for General Synod XXVI. In addition, a national network of directors of licensed/lay ministry training programs, including TAP, is being formed. One of the first tasks of the network will be the development of minimum standards for such programs so that they can be mutually recognized from Conference to Conference.

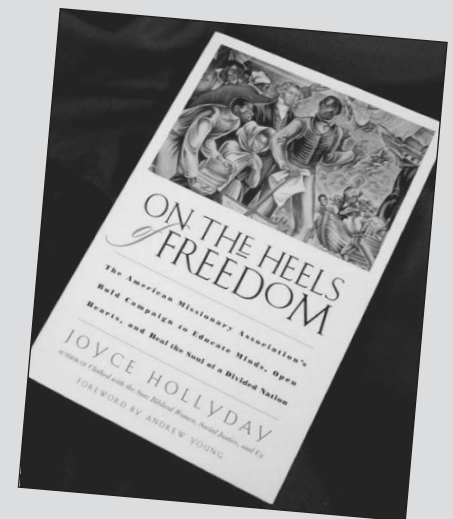
There are many among us who have worked, dreamed, and prayed long and hard for the passage of this Pronouncement and its implementation. Its passage invites us all to consider anew the meaning of ordination, of ministry, of learnedness and life-long learning, and of call. With the help of the Holy Spirit, and continuing discernment and dialogue, the UCC will move into the future empowered to more faithfully "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12).

Associate Conference Minister Kathy Clark is the Director of the TAP (Theology Among the People) program. Her energetic and pioneering work was crucial in getting this Pronouncement passed.

General Synod Items Still Available!



GS Logo T-Shirt	\$10
Cap	\$15
Tote Bag	\$6
Comma Earrings	\$24
Comma Lapel Pin	\$12
Chalice & Paten Set	\$60
"God is Still Speaking Y'all" T-Shirt	\$12
On the Heels of Freedom	\$19.95
UCC Cross Pin	\$15
UCC Sm. Cross Pendant	\$20
UCC Med. Cross Pendant	\$40
UCC Lg. Cross Pendant	\$40



To order, contact the
Conference office
at
800-807-1993 or
ghudson@secucc.org



OUR HONORED LAYWOMEN

Congratulations to Bette Graves Thomas of Atlanta and Peg Muenstermann of Pleasant Hill, Tennessee, the Southeast Conference's Honored Laywomen for 2005. They were celebrated at a General Synod luncheon for their years of faithful service to the church and society.



Peg Muenstermann



Bette Graves Thomas

GENERAL SYNOD HIGHLIGHTS AVAILABLE

If you missed General Synod XXV and want to know what all the buzz is about; or if you had a great time there and want to relive the highlights; or if you want materials to help your congregation discern and discuss the issues raised and resolutions adopted — the national UCC office has resources available.

General Synod Highlights DVD — \$19.95

Includes a wonderful montage of images and sounds that capture the essence of General Synod XXV. It also contains the entire plenary session debate and vote on the marriage equality resolution, as well as John Thomas' statement to the press that followed.

General Synod XXV Worship DVD Series — \$15 each; 3 for \$39; or all 6 for \$65

Contains each worship service from General Synod XXV, one per disk, including many offerings from the Southeast Conference. Friday, July 1: Sermon by John Thomas; Saturday, July 2: Sermon by Claudia De La Cruz; Sunday morning, July 3: Reflections by Milton Hurst, Joyce Hollyday, and Susan Mitchell; Sunday evening, July 3: Sermon by Kenneth Samuel; Monday, July 4: Jazz liturgy featuring the Dwight Andrews Jazz Quintet and Atlanta Community Jazz Chorus; Tuesday, July 5: Sermon by Nancy Hastings Sehested.

Order the above by calling 800-537-3394, or online at www.unitedchurchpress.com.

Resources to help facilitate thoughtful discussion on marriage and the marriage equality resolution are available online at www.ucc.org.



Hurricane Katrina Response

Across the Southeast Conference, there has been an outpouring of prayer, concern, and questions as to how to help those whose lives have been ripped asunder by Hurricane Katrina. We give thanks for all the generosity to this point. The need continues. Listed below are ways individuals and congregations can respond:

- Please pray for those whose lives have been devastated, and for those who are seeking to help them.
- Contributions to our partner in mission, Church World Service, are urgently needed. Those contributions can be sent through the Conference office, or directly on-line by clicking on <http://www.ucc.org/disaster/do82905.htm>.
- The Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Maryland, is encouraging the assembly of health, food, and school kits. For details, contact the Conference office.
- The Conference has received \$15,000 to assist evacuees in shelters in the Atlanta area. This money will be distributed as quickly as possible. We will gladly receive contributions designated "Hurricane Katrina, Local Support."
- RRISA (Refugee Resettlement and Immigration Services) of Atlanta will be working locally on behalf of Church World Service to assist evacuees in the Atlanta area. You may contact them through Sandra@rrisa.org. Short-term needs include food, clothing, and diapers. Long-term needs include furniture and other household goods. Volunteers and sponsoring churches are also being sought.
- The Florida Conference is organizing to receive skilled and semi-skilled groups to do housing repair when the time comes for work groups to go to the areas affected by the hurricane. Within a few weeks, we will deploy our Disaster Assistance Coordinator Will Rabert, along with other partners in disaster relief, to begin organizing a more substantive and longer-range presence. Let the Conference office know if you or your congregation are interested in participating.

Piedmont College in Demorest, Georgia, is among many educational institutions responding to the crisis by receiving students who had to flee from the Gulf states, waiving tuition, room, and board during the fall semester for those displaced by the storm. At the Conference office, we have contact information for local UCC congregations that have been affected, and we can communicate that information to you upon your request.

CALLLED TO SERVE

A Southern Strategy for New Church Development

By Tim Downs

"Where can I find a church that is a justice-seeking people?"

"I am looking for a church where I will be welcomed; where is the nearest United Church of Christ congregation?"

Email and voice mail with questions like these have been flying into the national offices of the United Church of Christ as a result of the "God is Still Speaking" initiative and General Synod XXV. The questions have come from people across the United States, but to the amazement of many, almost half of these inquiries have come from the states that comprise the Southern and Southeast Conferences.

Members of our Conference staff have been in conversation with the national UCC staff, the staff of Southern Conference, and with one another to begin to shape a response to the surge of interest in the United Church of Christ in our region. In collaboration with these partners, we are shaping a proposal around new church development called the "Southern Strategy." This proposal has been brought to the Board of Directors of the Conference.

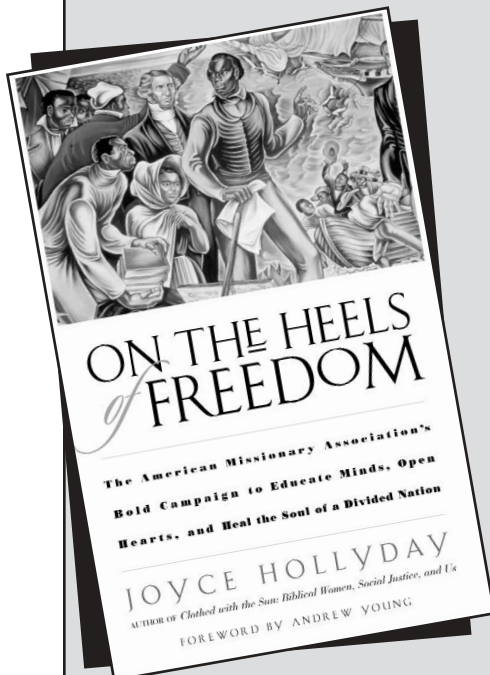
The Southeast Conference has been in conversation for the last year with two established congregations that have indicated a strong interest in affiliating with the United Church of Christ. Four additional congregations from across the Conference have entered preliminary conversations with us about joining the denomination. A number of people have approached the Conference with their interest in being called as new church start pastors. We believe that this is simply a beginning.

At this time, we do not have the staffing and support in place to do new church development at the level of activity to match the interest around us. We need training for new church pastors and support for pastors who are already doing new church development. In light of this, our staff, in collaboration with the Board of Directors of the Conference, is beginning to put into place a five-year plan. We are preparing to make a major commitment of funding, to seek a matching gift from the national UCC, and to embark on an effort to seek grant support for this undertaking. We will also be engaging in conversations with seminaries to explore ways in which we can collaborate in training both lay and ordained leadership.

We are being called to serve people across the South who are looking for congregations that respond to the God who calls us to love and to justice. These people are being drawn to our extravagant hospitality and evangelical courage, and are seeking others who are listening to the "Still-speaking God."

It's Here!

On the Heels of Freedom: The American Missionary Association's Bold Campaign to Educate Minds, Open Hearts, and Heal the Soul of a Divided Nation — By Joyce Hollyday, Foreword by Andrew Young; \$19.95



At General Synod XXV, we celebrated the publication of *On the Heels of Freedom*, the book based on five years of research and collection of oral histories in our AMA churches across the Southeast Conference. It's now available through the Conference office, your local bookstore or on-line bookseller, or by going to www.crossroadpublishing.com.

This lively account provides a story that inspires and instructs.

—John H. Thomas
UCC General Minister and President

To hear the story of the AMA churches and schools from the voices of those who were the beneficiaries of this tremendous effort is a blessing beyond compare that will change your life forever.

—Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr.
Trinity UCC, Chicago

On The Heels of Freedom is an important addition to the literature of race relations in the South.

—Odessa Woolfolk
Birmingham Civil Rights Institute

This book is packed with nuance and detail that will serve well our memory, which will in turn fund a healthy possible future society.

—Walter Brueggemann
Columbia Theological Seminary

Written with the skill of Alice Walker, Joyce Hollyday's illuminating history is a tour de force.

—Noel Leo Erskine
Emory University

Seoul-Searching '05

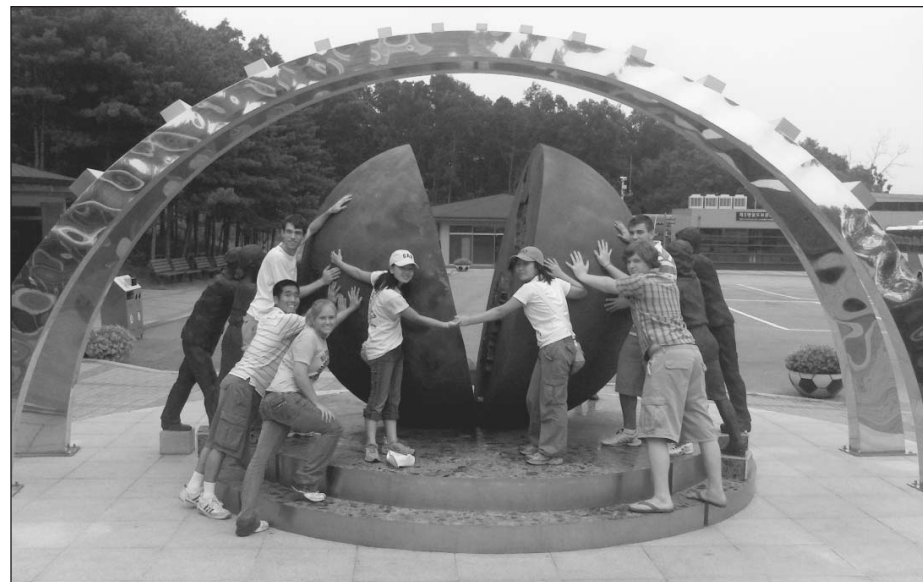
A Youth Immersion Experience in Korea

By Betsy Taylor Flory

It can be one of the most disorienting passages of a lifetime: to leave one's home culture for another and return with new eyes to see what was once familiar. Even a brief immersion in a new place can render much of what we have taken for granted as startling or peculiar, wonderful or nonsensical. But these new perspectives on old visions can also be life-giving for individuals and the church.

To that end, the Southeast Conference youth ministry regularly takes young people outside our U.S. culture to see how the church looks in other places. This year we went to visit our sister church, Seoul BoGeum in South Korea, pastored by Rev. Kwan-Hae Chi. While we were there, we worked in BoGeum's elder outreach and Vacation Bible School program, and led the programming for a youth retreat. We served a fellowship meal to the church while we learned about Korean culture, which is much more oriented toward the community than to individuals. Christians are a minority in the society, which also affects the shape of the church there. Read what two of our young people had to say about their experiences:

Though I have attended churches full of Koreans in a country full of Americans (the United States), it was a different experience to attend a church full of Koreans in a country full of Koreans (South Korea). The Christians in Korea are much more confident about engaging and interacting with society outside of their church, unlike Korean Christians in the U.S., who must overcome language and cultural barriers in order to engage with the majority of American society. I am happy that Korean churches in the U.S. are a place where immigrants can come together and enjoy the company of



"Mending the world" at a sculpture for reunification near the Demilitarized Zone.

those who share their culture, but it was nice to see the Korean churches in Korea and know that the only cultural difference between those in the church and those outside was the culture of Christianity.

As Christians, we'd like to think that the culture of Christianity has a greater influence in our lives than whatever country we come from, whatever language we speak, whatever food we eat, whatever clothes we wear, and so on. But this trip to Korea reminded me how much our ethnic cultures mean to our lifestyles and thought processes. These differences cannot be ignored and should be addressed when we think about Christianity and the world.

—Roy

The biggest difference that I felt in Korea was the language barrier. Being unable to communicate with the culture around you at that level is very disorienting; it's like a sensory loss. But what struck me most about this experience was that it paralleled the way I had

been feeling within the church in America. The language that others use to talk about God often doesn't reflect my experience or understanding at all. I empathized with the Korean-American students on our trip who were constantly asked to translate. For me, sitting in the pews at Sunday worship is a time when I have to translate, and it's exhausting.

This year I started asking myself if, to continue to grow, I needed to find a spiritual home outside of the UCC or even the Christian church. However, attending my first General Synod in Atlanta and witnessing there so much sincere desire for justice reminded me why I have faith, so to speak, in the church and in our denomination in particular.

We went to Korea to observe the way the Body of Christ looks across cultures. What I saw at the Seoul BoGeum Church was a congregation of believers doing God's work as a community, actively showing love and hospitality to everyone, from preschoolers to elders. That's a language deeper than words. And where it's spoken, I don't think I'll ever feel alienated from my God.

—Ellen

Our young people commented over and over again on the level of hospitality shown to us by the members of BoGeum. From the endless feasts to the constant presence of volunteer guides and the welcome of the youth group, we have never felt so loved or cared for as we did during our stay in Seoul. We sincerely hope we can return the gracious welcome we received, when BoGeum sends their youth group here in the summer of 2007. Watch for details. For pictures and more commentary on our trip, go to www.seucc.org and click on the Youth button, then click on Seoul-Searching 2.

Betsy Taylor Flory is Director of Youth Ministries for the Southeast Conference.



Working together at the BoGeum youth retreat.

Marriage Equality Resolution Passed by General Synod

On July 4, the United Church of Christ took a historic step when General Synod delegates voted overwhelmingly to support same-gender marriage equality. UCC General Minister and President John Thomas, recognizing that some would feel disappointed, or even betrayed, by the vote immediately called us to prayer. He prayed in part, "We know that every choice confers a cost, so let us attend in the coming hours and days to those for whom this decision confers a particular burden. Let us find words that comfort rather than congratulate; let us seek to be a community of grace and forgiveness rather than organizing constituencies of protest; let us use our hands not to clap, but to wipe away every tear." Below are two perspectives on the vote.

A Personal Response

When the General Synod vote on marriage equality came across overwhelmingly in support of equal marriage rights for all, those around me shed tears of joy and hugged each other in relief, as years of struggle and faithful witness finally came to fruition. I was surprised by my own lack of emotion at the result of the vote. Why was I not moved to tears like those around me? I think the answer to that question is a testament to where the United Church of Christ has been, where it is now, and where we are headed. It is a testament to the work and witness of those who have formed and shaped this denomination into what it is today.



You see, I did not expect the vote to go any other way. I am new to the United Church of Christ. I joined Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta last November. The UCC I know is the church that voted overwhelmingly in support of equal rights. The UCC I know could not have voted any other way. The UCC I know is the church of the "extravagant welcome." The UCC I know has always welcomed me.

It was not until I got home later that night that the full weight of what had transpired hit me. I perused the pictures of General Synod on the UCC website and found a picture of me from the Sunday evening worship service. The picture was taken as I carried the bread to the altar for the celebration of the Eucharist.

It reminded me of another picture. In May of last year, I attended the national General Conference of the United Methodist Church. Two of my friends and I stood in witness with hundreds of other Reconciling United Methodists while debate and a vote took place. I held my breath as I waited for the numbers to appear on the screen. The picture, taken the moment after the vote reaffirming the church's prohibition on ordaining gays and lesbians was displayed, depicts the anguish and defeat that filled that room and the hearts of those gathered. The church I loved had once again refused to recognize my gifts and the gifts of all its gay and lesbian members. Through that picture, I became a kind of poster child for sad, gay people after General Conference in countless newsletters and publications.

After the plenary session adjourned, those who had stood in witness gathered to share the Eucharist. The service was solemn and filled with tears. At the end of the meal, one man came forward to the altar, lifted the chalice high in the air, and let it drop to the floor, shattering. One by one we picked up the pieces and placed them back on the altar next to a candle. A picture of that candle and broken chalice hangs over my desk. For me, it is a symbol and a reminder of the brokenness we all felt that day. The church I loved was a broken body, and I too felt broken.

But now I have a new picture. The picture of me carrying the broken body into a new community, a community that welcomes me where I am and as I am. As I presented the elements at the table, my offering was finally acceptable.

Karen Mann
Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta



Visit our website at
www.secucc.org

An Open Letter

The Marriage Equality resolution has had devastating effects on the East Alabama-West Georgia Association. Some of our churches have cut off OCWM contributions, while others have withdrawn or are considering withdrawing from the United Church of Christ. There seems to be no middle ground for either side on this issue. Those who are in favor of it are convinced it is the right thing to do. Those who are against it are equally convinced it is the wrong thing to do. In the past, there was some type of middle ground where we could "agree to disagree," so to speak. Not this time. I pray we all will take a step back, seek discernment from God, and always show Christian love and compassion.



The most devastating effect of all is the feeling of not having a voice. Perhaps you have been there. If so, you know how helpless one feels in that position. Another issue is covenant. While these churches hear that they are guilty of breaking covenant, they are convinced that General Synod broke covenant by passing a resolution that would cause "division and pain." This resolution has certainly caused a lot of division and pain in the East Alabama-West Georgia Association.

To get a sense of the pain, I suppose those who support this resolution need to consider the pain they would feel had General Synod passed a resolution calling for the opposite of the one passed. If General Synod had passed a resolution calling for marriage to be only between one man and one woman; if General Synod had called upon the churches to change wedding policies to reflect that marriage equals one man and one woman; if General Synod had called upon the churches to engage in a campaign to contact senators, congressmen, and state legislators urging them to pass the constitutional amendment defining marriage to be between one man and one woman—would such a resolution have caused "pain and division"? I believe that, if such a resolution had been passed, churches that support marriage equality would be taking action similar to what the conservative churches are now taking.

Why is it that we have to put churches in a win-lose position? Why can't we take a lesson from Scripture? The writer of Corinthians states, "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." (1 Corinthians 12:26, NRSV) Why can't we ask our churches to pray, seek discernment from God, and then follow God's leadership? I trust God and I trust the churches! I wish General Synod would do the same.

Sincerely,
Roy Bain, Pastor
Lanett Congregational Christian UCC,
Lanett, Alabama

VOICES & VISIONS

Voices & Visions, the Southeast Conference United Church of Christ section of the United Church News (USPS 764-070) is published four times a year. Its mission is to promote current events and conference news, offering information and inspiration to members. Views expressed in editorials, letters, and signed columns are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect official Conference or UCC policies.

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Southeast Feast

Food for the Heart and Soul



*Precious Lord, take my hand,
lead me on, let me stand.
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
Through the storm, through the
night, lead me on to the light;
Take my hand, precious Lord,
lead me home.*

By Joyce Hollyday

The phone rang on Friday, August 5. Milton Hurst was calling. A month after General Synod, we were still smiling. Still reveling in the graced moment when he, Susan Mitchell, and I shared the stage and told the story of our five-year oral history project in our American Missionary Association churches that led to the publication of *On the Heels of Freedom*. That Sunday morning, Milton had moved the throng gathered in Atlanta to tears when he sang "Precious Lord, Take My Hand" — before he even began his poignant reflections about evenings spent as a boy on the porch of his grandparents, who had been slaves.

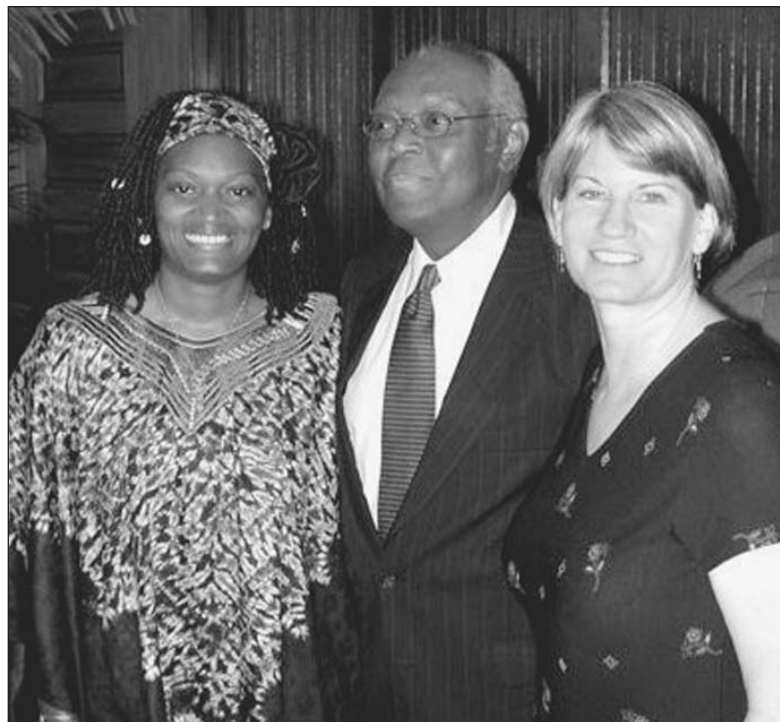
Milton had brought several members from his church, First Congregational United Church of Christ in Talladega, Alabama, for the Sunday morning service, including 99-year-old Ms. Mable Moore in her wheelchair. UCC General Minister and President John Thomas, and renowned church and civil rights leader Andrew Young, posed for pictures with her and all the other members of AMA churches who had come from far and wide for the celebration. "General Synod was just phase one," said Milton with great enthusiasm on our call. He had visions of a tour and meetings across the South to continue the celebration of the book. We began to make plans.

Before we hung up—just before Milton's characteristic parting blessing of "You know I love you"—he asked me if I would write a letter of recommendation to the Alabama-Tennessee Association Church and Ministry Committee on his behalf. Because, although at 72 years old he had spent many years as a pastor, he had never been ordained. I was delighted to support his pursuit of ordination, and I spent time that weekend thinking about all the lovely things I wanted to say about him. Milton was always an outstanding mentor, teacher, and encourager to me. A bright light. A rare spirit.

That Sunday night, Tim Downs called to tell me that Milton had been found dead at his home. Like many of us, I was stunned by the news. I couldn't comprehend losing such a dear friend so suddenly.

I was in San Francisco at the time of the memorial service for Milton. At the same hour that friends and colleagues were gathering in Talladega to remember him, I lit a candle on the other side of the country and watched the videotape of my 1998 ordination service. A highlight of that celebration was Milton's soaring solo of the hymn "It Is Well With My Soul." I wept.

That voice. Oh, how we will miss that voice. During a business session at General Synod, delegates voted to give all past moderators of Synod "voice without vote" status. Milton was among those so hon-



Susan Mitchell, Milton Hurst, and Joyce Hollyday on their last visit to collect oral histories, at renowned Woodworth Chapel in Tougaloo, Mississippi.

ored. After Milton sang, the presider reminded the crowd of that decision and said with a smile, "And if we had had any idea of what an extraordinary voice it was, we would have done it much sooner."

My grief has come in waves. I'm thankful that our annual Southeast Conference staff retreat was scheduled for just two weeks after Milton's death. Tim Downs, Gerri Ryons-Hudson, Bennie Liggins, Kathy Clark, Betsy Flory, Susan Mitchell, Cameron Trimble, and I gathered at Cameron's lovely lake house near Montgomery, Alabama. During our first evening together, we watched the DVD of the Sunday morning service at General Synod, being blessed once more by Milton's singing of "Precious Lord." Then we moved outside, where Susan led us in an African ritual of libation to the ancestors by candlelight. We told stories about Milton, wept, hugged, gave thanks. We were especially grateful that Milton had enjoyed such a glorious moment at General Synod, and that we all have that memory to cling to.

Somebody said, "He always said 'You know I love you' at the end of every phone call." We all laughed then. "And I thought it was just to me," someone else chimed in. And just as surely as Milton ended every call that way, he responded to every inquiry of "How are you?" with the words "I'm blessed."

When I think of Milton, the word *dignity* comes to mind. Milton Hurst lived with dignity, and he died with dignity. The greatest gift we can give in his memory is to encourage one another, being lavish in our words of appreciation and affection. I know one soloist in heaven's angel choir—whose precious Lord took him by the hand and led him home—who will smile every time we do.

We thank you and we miss you, beloved Reverend Hurst.

*When peace, like a river, upholds me each day,
When sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot, you have taught me to say,
"It is well, it is well with my soul."*

CONFERENCE CALENDAR

OCTOBER 1

GA-SC Association Church and Ministry Committee
Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta

OCTOBER 1-2

Conference Staff Visit
Unity Church, Montgomery, AL

OCTOBER 4

Conference Staff Visit
Deer Lodge Congregational UCC, Deer Lodge, TN

OCTOBER 6, 13, 20, 27

UCC History and Polity Class
Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta

OCTOBER 8

Conference Bylaws Committee
Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, TN

OCTOBER 15

EAL-WGA Association Annual Meeting
Allen Retreat Center, Lafayette, AL

OCTOBER 21

ALA-TENN Association Church and Ministry Committee
United Church UCC, Huntsville, AL

OCTOBER 21-22

ALA-TENN Association Fall Meeting
United Church UCC, Huntsville, AL

OCTOBER 21-23

Southern Regional UCC Women's Conference
St. Simon's Island, GA

OCTOBER 25-27

Board of Directors, Office of General Ministries
Cleveland, OH

NOVEMBER 1-3

Cabinet, Council of Conference Ministers
Cleveland, OH

NOVEMBER 5

GA-SC Association Annual Meeting
TBA

NOVEMBER 9

Conference Staff Meeting
Conference Office, Atlanta, GA

NOVEMBER 10-14

Conference Staff Consultation with ECU
Berlin, Germany

NOVEMBER 18

ALA-TENN Church and Ministry Committee
Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, TN

NOVEMBER 18-19

Board of Directors Meeting
TBA

NOVEMBER 21

Conference hosts Formula of Agreement Partner
Judiciary Leaders
Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta

NOVEMBER 29-DECEMBER 2

New Church Development Conference Staff
Gathering
Las Vegas, NV